



Olmsted 200

Bicentennial Notes about Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 21

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Grand Pacific Junction Saved Downtown Olmsted Falls

If you think about historic structures in Olmsted Falls, it would be hard for Grand Pacific Junction not to come to mind. So many buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s are concentrated there.

The buildings are not exactly the same as they were many decades ago, but they still give visitors a good impression of what Olmsted Falls looked like back then. They distinguish the community from many other Cleveland suburbs where redevelopment and renewal resulted in the removal of old buildings and their replacement with strip malls and other commercial structures that represented growth following World War II.



The same thing could have happened in the center of Olmsted Falls if not for the vision of one man, Clint Williams, more than a quarter century ago. In the 1980s, Bill Kucklick, who owned Kucklick's Village Square Shoppe, decided to retire. He called Williams, the owner of Clint Williams Realty.

“Clint, I want to sell,” Williams recalled Kucklick telling him. “Why don’t you come in?”

Kucklick’s father, Fritz, had started the business across Columbia Road decades earlier. In the mid-20th century, it moved into the Depositors Building. After Simmerer



Clint Williams is seen here conducting the Butter Churn Drawing for \$100 that is held daily during Olmsted Heritage Days at Grand Pacific Junction.

would have been gone.”

After he showed the property to other potential buyers, he stood at the corner of Orchard and Mill streets one day and took a fresh look at it. “I really hadn’t paid that much attention to it before, but it just kind of struck me as an old-fashioned town,” Williams said. “Then I said, ‘Maybe I ought to buy it and restore one [building] at a time.’”

Williams said the property contained “everything to make a town, except a schoolhouse and a church. We had the hotel. We had the bank building. We had the different storefronts, flat storefronts. We had the jail. Everything was here, and I did acquire the church, so I have a church in my town now – the Wedding Chapel.”

After talking it over with his wife, he worked out a deal with Kucklick for the property, which was bounded by Columbia Road to the east, Mill Street to the south, Plum Creek to the west and the railroad tracks to the north.

Williams envisioned putting in retail stores, professional offices, an upscale restaurant and perhaps a bed-and-breakfast in the buildings after he restored them. He bought the property, which then contained 10 buildings on two acres, late in 1989.

At that time, Williams had spent his career selling buildings rather than restoring them, but he did have notable experience in renovating one other Olmsted Falls building.

and Sons’ Hardware closed in 1971, that building, which was a former hotel, became Kucklick’s Village Square Shoppe Annex, essentially a storage building for the early American-style furniture sold by Kucklick’s. Other old buildings were on the grounds, so most of the buildings that make up the core of Grand Pacific Junction were up for sale by Kucklick. “But everything was very much in disarray,” Williams said. Anything could have happened to those buildings – and almost did.

At one point, Williams put together an option for National City Bank officials to buy land at the corner of Columbia Road and Mill Street for the site of a new branch.

“They decided not to, and they went across the street,” Williams said. “But if they would have, the hotel



Clint Williams saw almost a complete town in the buildings he restored as Grand Pacific Junction.



This building was Schady's Shell station for three decades.

was zoned for such use – and eventually the city relented. In 1981, the Cleveland Area Board of Realtors gave the building a Medallion Home Award for helping to “preserve, protect and upgrade the real estate market.”

In January 1990, Williams revealed his plans for renovating the buildings he had bought from Kucklick. Initially, city officials and residents responded positively to the proposal. The Architectural Review Board gave its approval. The board’s chairman, Tom Rathburn, was quoted in the *News Sun* as calling it “a fantastic opportunity for the city.” At the same time, Kate McHale of the Cuyahoga County Community Development Division said, “This project could totally turn that downtown area around and make it gorgeous. I think it would be a great opportunity for the city.” She said it could bring in \$1 million worth of improvements.

Other newspaper articles in 1990 referred to some of the buildings as being “neglected, substandard” and “dilapidated.” Years later, in March 2005, Kim Beckwith, who then operated the Treasures from the Heart gift shop at the northern end of the Depositors Building, recalled that, before renovation, the buildings were “dingy. It was dilapidated looking.” She said, “For a downtown area, it was really depressing.” Beckwith said she and a friend “always wondered how long until they tore the buildings down and put a CVS [drug store] or something in. Then we were pleasantly surprised to see the renovations start.”

Pat McLaughlin, who for many years operated Antiques Down Under in the basement of the old house that contains Mary’s Hair Solon at 8086 Columbia Road, said the property looked “terrible” before Williams created Grand Pacific Junction.

In 1978, he converted what had been Schady’s Shell service station at the northwestern corner of Columbia Road and Water Street into an office for his real estate business, which he started in 1966. The gas station had been built in 1926 on land where Chauncey Meade had operated a harness shop in the 1800s. Gordon Schady operated the gas station from 1935 until 1965. Some people didn’t like the idea of having a real estate office there, and city officials threw some regulatory hurdles in the way of the renovation, which was a precursor of what Williams later faced with Grand Pacific Junction. But he threatened to put another gas station into the building – the property already



Clint Williams received an award for his conversion of the former gas station into the Olmsted Falls office of his real estate company. Photo by Bruce Banks.



Some of the buildings at what is now Grand Pacific Junction, such as the former granary, showed signs of years of neglect before Clint Williams restored them. This building now houses Shamrock & Rose Creations. Photo courtesy of Clint Williams.

part of the Depositors Building for many years, Williams's intervention, the property might have become the site of "McDonald's, Burger King, a check-cashing store – you know everything that consists of making a ghetto out of a neighborhood."

His store was the third one to move into Grand Pacific Junction, Bonacci said and pulled out photos to show what the Depositors Building looked like before he moved in. "You know, when I look back at these pictures, I think to myself, *God, I must have been drunk when I rented this building*," he said.

Although city officials and others initially reacted positively to Williams's proposal, he ran into some obstacles in getting his plans approved. One of the biggest was opposition from Mill River Development, owner of the shopping center across the street, which objected to the zoning board's attempt to give Williams a variance to allow the project to proceed with only 95 parking spaces instead of the 167 spaces called for in the zoning code. Mill River was afraid that its parking lot would get the spillover from people who could not find enough spots at Grand Pacific Junction.

Although the planning commission approved the parking variance, Olmsted Falls City Council overruled that decision. That wasn't the only problem Williams faced.

"The buildings were trash," she said in 2005. "There wasn't any hope in the buildings. It would have to be somebody who had a keen eye – the ordinary person wouldn't have seen what he did see in refurbishing it. It was all trashy along here.... This house here was like an old tenement. The people would have their clothes out on the front porch. It was like a real dump."

If Williams had not fixed up the buildings, McLaughlin said, someone else would have redeveloped the property in a less-appealing way. "It would have been just like across the street [at Mill River Plaza] – another strip mall," she said.

Mike Bonacci, who ran the Grand Pacific Junction Model Railroad & Hobby Company in



The Depositors Building, built in 1924, went through extensive renovations to become part of Grand Pacific Junction.



Clint Williams changed the entire character of one side of the Depositors Building.

could slow things down and not let it happen, but we prevailed.”

Williams said at times he had to go to three meetings a week with city officials.

“I finally said, ‘To hell with it,’ and I just started to work on it,” he said.

However, Williams said, he had to scale the project down a bit. In September 1990, the *News Sun* quoted him saying, “If we could have gone ahead with our plans, Mill Street would look more like an 1890 street than it will now, but this will look nice.”

The newspaper also quoted him saying, “I threatened to sell this after I had problems with some of City Council. But I live here. I’m proud of my community and I have a lot of community support, which helped keep me going.”

By the time that article was published, Williams already had moved the old jail and the old carriage house to more suitable locations and put new foundations under all of the buildings, except for the former hotel/hardware store, which was scheduled to get a new foundation the following summer. It was later that fall that he started using the name Grand Pacific Junction for the development. That was because he restored the name Grand Pacific Hotel to the former hardware store. For a brief period in the 1800s, when the building was used as a hotel, it went by that name. Despite the name, the building has been used as a banquet facility rather than as a hotel.



Clint Williams keeps a book of photos showing the changes he made to Grand Pacific Junction buildings. Here he shows it to Andy Verhoff of the Ohio Historical Society, August 20, 2011.



A gazebo overlooking Plum Creek was one new structures Clint Williams added to Grand Pacific Junction. This photo showing its construction is courtesy of Clint Williams.

caboose next to it. He consulted with four paint companies on the colors for the buildings but rejected their ideas and chose the colors himself. As the years went on, he bought more buildings in the neighborhood and even built new structures to complement the old ones.

“Olmsted Falls didn’t have a downtown,” Williams said. “It was gone. So this created first a downtown for the people to come and sit and browse and eat an ice cream cone – whatever they want to do. I think the reason it worked was because of the fact there are flat storefronts like in the late 1800s, there are Victorian homes and the hotel....And then, there’s always been an ambience about this place. When you walk through it, you get a feeling.”

The work at Grand Pacific Junction was not completed early in 1992 when the county presented Williams and the city with Neighborhood Business District Revitalization Awards. It recognized their joint participation in a \$250,000 Community Development Block Grant that required matching funds from Williams. Kate McHale, manager of community development for the county, was quoted in the *News Sun* as saying about Williams, “He eliminated a major blighted area and rejuvenated not only the buildings but the downtown Olmsted Falls area into a wonderful commercial project. He has done more in his storefront area than any other throughout the county.”

Williams has received other awards for Grand Pacific Junction since then.

“We put in 19 merchants in 24 months,” Williams said. “I guess you have to appreciate the fact that we had no city sewers, so sewer just came in then. We had to put sewers to all these buildings, electrical, gas, all new furnaces, all new air-conditioning.”

In addition to moving buildings, Williams restored some features that had been changed, such as windows and dormers, and altered other features to make the buildings function better as stores and restaurants. He added a gazebo overlooking Plum Creek and parked a 1922 Vulcan locomotive and a red



The 1922 Vulcan locomotive and caboose are a popular attraction at Grand Pacific Junction.

This is the first in a series of stories about Grand Pacific Junction. Future stories will focus on the history of individual buildings. Next issue, the featured building will be the Grand Pacific Hotel, which has lent its name to the entire development and has the longest history of all the buildings.

Snow Decorates Damp's Mill

The historical structures around Olmsted are quite photogenic. It is interesting to capture their images in all seasons to see how they look in different lighting conditions and weather.

In 1982, *Olmsted 200* reader Ted Kucklick took this photo of the foundation of Damp's Mill on a morning when the temperature was below zero Fahrenheit.



Photo courtesy of Ted Kucklick.

Damp's Mill on a morning when the temperature was below zero Fahrenheit.

For more on Damp's Mill, see past issues of *Olmsted 200*, including Issue 5 from October 2013 with a history of Damp's Mill written by Bruce Banks and Issue 16 from September 2014 with the story of the dedication of the new historical marker on the observation deck overlooking the foundation of Damp's Mill.

If you have one or more photos of sights from Olmsted's past that you would like to share with *Olmsted 200* readers, send them to:
wallacestar@hotmail.com

News of the Past

What was making news in Olmsted 100 years ago? Editions of the *Berea Enterprise* from early in 1915 included these items in the Olmsted Falls column:

From January 15, 1915: “James Scroggie, Jr., is having his house wired for electric lights.”

From February 5, 1915:

- “A great deal of thought and hard work is being put on the Community Church proposition. It is a good thing. Help it along.” [At the time the Methodist Episcopal Church was in the building that now is the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel, and the Congregational Church was directly across the street. In 1917, they merged to form the Olmsted Community Church, which built its current facility about four decades later.]
- “An effort is being made to reorganize the fire department. Since Mr. Rydman left the Falls, the boys have lost all interest.”
- “The ordinance compelling vehicles to carry lights after dark is not being enforced.”
- “Board of Public Service has asked council to appropriate \$1300 for use for first half of 1915.”

From February 19, 1915:

- “Moving Pictures every Saturday night at the Town Hall at 7:30 eastern time.”
- “In appreciation of their patronage all children under 13 years of age, accompanied by an adult, will be admitted free of charge at the picture show, Saturday, Feb. 27. Special pictures.”
- “The village council has been notified that the gas franchise about which there has been so much controversy will not be accepted by the gas people.”
- “Marshal Nichols has tendered his resignation to the town dads. His successor has not been named.”
- “The sidewalk in front of the stone quarry property is in a deplorable condition. Can’t something be done to improve it?”

From February 26, 1915: “Work has been resumed on the Mill-st. bridge and an early completion is promised, weather permitting.”

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next story in the series about Grand Pacific Junction. Also in the works is an article that a shortage of time and space prevented from being included in this issue. It will be about a one-armed photographer who worked in Olmsted Falls in the 1870s and 1880s. Another article still on the way

will provide a glimpse into what Olmsted Falls was like more than 60 years ago, based on a map that was a souvenir of the 1954 Homecoming.

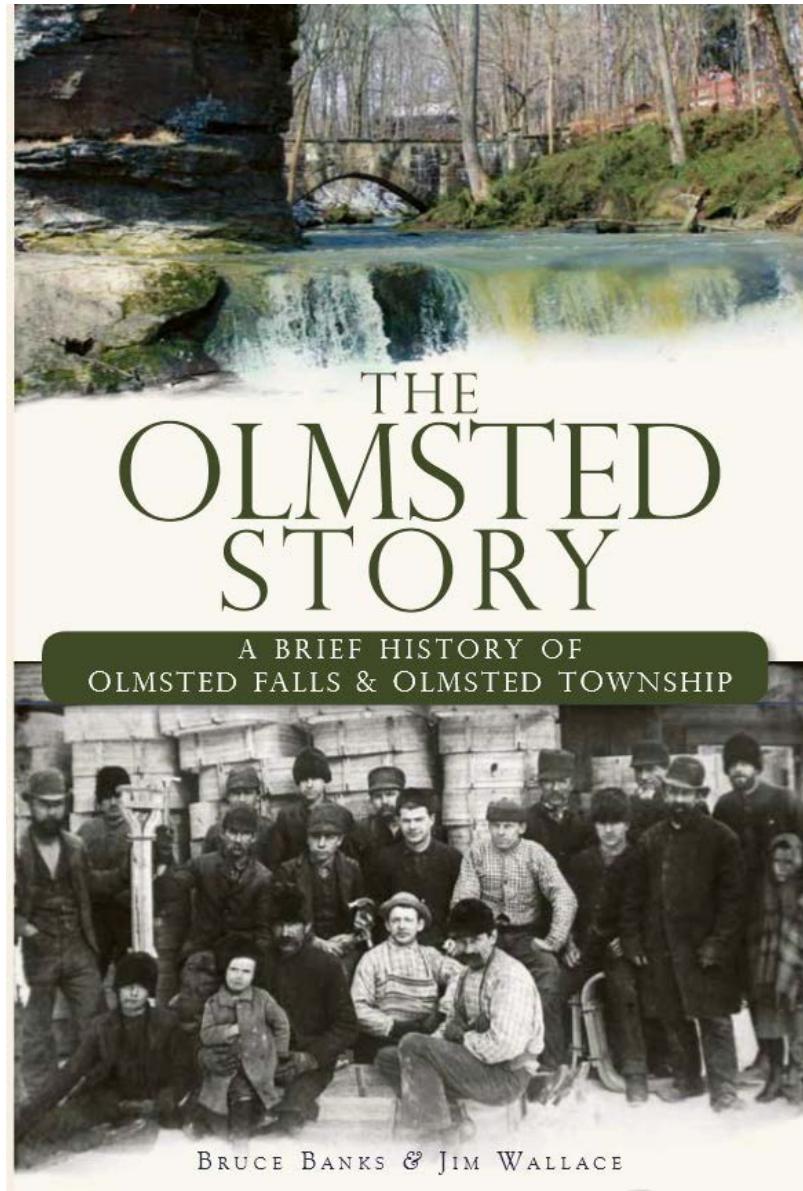
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as overseas in Mongolia and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200."

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. ***The Olmsted Story*** is available at Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction, the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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